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Book Reviews.

The Hope of Immortality. By REV. J. E. C. WELLDON, Head Master of Harrow School. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1898. Pp. 350. \$1.50.

This book is written by one of the most learned and pious of the leaders of the English church. Since its publication he has shown evidence of his devotion to his faith by giving up his honorable and lucrative position as head master of Harrow, one of England's greatest public schools, to accept the bishopric of Calcutta, a post less well paid and involving great labor, responsibility, and trial. The book treats a lofty and vital theme of religion with dignity, candor, and deep religious feeling. Passages of fervor and of insight enhanced by a certain stateliness of style, not unlike that of his favorite Bishop Butler, as well as sentences of epigrammatic force and brilliancy, show that the author has long brooded over his theme and has brought to his task a pen trained in the best classic schools. We could hardly expect less from the master of Harrow and the translator of Aristotle.

And yet the book is disappointing. Why? It is hard to explain why. Perhaps it is because one expects more than is given, than it is fair to expect. Would we not all hail a series of invincible proofs for immortality! Do we not long, to be sure, of the life beyond death! Yet, this is precisely what the author does not furnish, does not even proffer. It is a "hope," a "belief" for which there is "reasonable probability."

But, to go deeper and utter a paradox — has not Mr. Welldon overestimated our interest in the problem of immortality? Has not the very demand which he makes on us by his claim of the overwhelming importance of his subject recoiled on himself because of our failure to respond? There is in reality no very strong interest today in the problem of immortality in itself, in spite of the recent hysterics of the *British Weekly*, and, to speak frankly, we do not regard this as altogether blameworthy. For of the three reasons explaining this curious situation two at least carry no blame with them. These three reasons are briefly (1) the old materialistic spirit which denies the existence of aught but matter; (2) the new spirit of social service which empha-

sizes the duty of the true man to give himself here and now for the uplifting of those about him; (3) the old teaching of the New Testament, now being more clearly seen and accepted, that eternal life is a state of soul which is to be sought and found now in Christ—a “communion with the eternal righteousness and the eternal blessedness.”

It is, of course, clear that on the first basis there is no room for immortality, as there is no place for God and the soul. But is it not equally clear that, the more the two latter positions are taken, the importance of immortality as a vital and central doctrine dwindles? When, also, we reflect that the bulk of the Old Testament is silent as to the life beyond, and that Jesus Christ never argues for it, but everywhere assumes it, may we not wonder whether it is not a mistake thus to isolate and push forward a theme which may, after all, be an inference, a corollary, an adjunct, of some deeper, wider, truer reality?

And what is that reality? It is God—for us Christians it is Jesus Christ. Mr. Welldon says as much when, after he has defined what immortality is, and the value of the belief in it, and the evidences, external and internal for it, he declares: “Upon the whole I see no convincing argument (in spite of much probability) for the soul’s immortality apart from the sublime belief in Him” (p. 367). Just so, and therefore the true point from which to attack the subject is to stand in the presence of Jesus, to study him, to learn the secret of his life, to receive his spirit into the heart. This first—not relegated, as Mr. Welldon has done, to a final chapter, however eloquent and inspiring that chapter may be. Jesus is the evidence and ground of immortality—there or nowhere will you accept it.

There are other weaknesses which might be pointed out in this book, such as its confusion as to just what is meant by immortality, its antiquated psychology, its strange argument in behalf of prayers for the dead, its utilitarian ethics—but it is sufficient to put the reader on his guard.

Yes, it is true, one cannot help disappointment as he closes the book—but it is disappointment at the totality, at the meager resultant, at the weakness of many of the special conclusions resting on uncertain premises, not dissatisfaction with the spirit of the author, nor with much that he urges, nor with the dignity and splendor of his theme.

G. S. G.